

2/24/22

Dear Members of the Appropriation Committee,

I want to thank the members of the Appropriations Committee for allowing me to testify today on HB 5037. Karl and I are no strangers to the LOB and to many of you fine legislators and senators. Many of you have heard Karl sing about his dream to live in his own apartment. Because DDS funded Karl for residential and day services, many of Karl's dreams have come true. Karl is living successfully in his own apartment in New Haven and working in the community supported by wonderful non- profits such as Chapel Haven and Marrakech. He takes a taxi to East Street Arts where he works as an artisan caning chairs and creating beautiful art work. Karl attends community line dance class and is active as a choir member and cellist at Bethesda Lutheran Church. He swam with the CT Special Olympic swim team at the national games in Seattle, Washington. Karl's successes were featured in the CT Public TV special "Building a Great Life". This documentary shows how far Karl has come from being a non-verbal 3-year-old with autism to living in his own apartment, performing on the cello, singing in a church choir and providing community service in the city of New Haven. Because of DDS supports, we have been able to help Karl build a great life in New Haven.

The pandemic hit disabled people like Karl hard. His ordered life with consistent staffing came to a screeching halt. His autistic behaviors increased and DDS was there to provide funding for a behaviorist to work with Karl and his staff.

The worker shortage has been a huge problem for people like Karl. Karl needs qualified staff that are treated like professionals. Non profit agencies need more funding to provide incentives to employees to make working with the disabled population a career, not just a low paying temporary job. I am grateful that the legislator increased base wages for workers to \$17.00 per hour, which is a good start but not enough to retain qualified staff. I am also grateful that no cuts have been made to DDS. However, past administrations made massive cuts to DDS over many years, so increases to the DDS budget are imperative.

There is now a budget surplus and the rainy day fund is at its maximum level. The state will also be receiving substantial federal funding from

ARPA, The American Revenue ACT. Please use the increased state and federal monies to repair the damage that past underfunding of DDS created.

Without DDS's support none of Karl's amazing success would have been possible. So I thank our state for what they have given Karl. I urge all elected officials to give DDS the funding they need to address the workforce crisis at provider agencies and employee turnover due to low wages and lack of benefits. DDS needs increased funding to provide day, residential and behavioral services to people like Karl in our state.

Thank you.

Lynn S. Arezzini

(Below: Karl Arezzini proudly stands by his own apartment.)



Arezzini